THE WORLD.

NUMBER CX.

By *ADAM FITZ-ADAM.*

To be continued every THURSDAY.

THURSDAY, *February* the 6th, 1755.

——Uno avulſo non deficit alter
Aureus, et ſimili frondeſcit virga metallo.

VIRG.

THOUGH I have ſtudied the ways of men with the ſtricteſt application for many years, I muſt ingenuouſly confeſs my inability to dive into the ſecrets of one particular ſociety, the members of which, by their ſuperior capacities, have hitherto inveloped themſelves in an impenetrable cloud of myſtery. Every body muſt have obſerved that in all public places in this kingdom there are ſwarms of adventurers, who neither derive any poſſeſſions from provident anceſtors, nor are of any profeſſion,

ſeſſion, yet who figure moſt ſplendidly both in the great and ſmall world, to the amazement of all who know them. The only anſwer I could ever obtain, when I have enquired how Mr. Such-a-one, a member of this ſociety lived, was, *The Lord knows.* Which anſwer one would think ſhould imply, that HE *who feedeth the ravens, and cloatheth the lillies of the field,* had thus plentifully provided for them, imperceptible to the eyes of other mortals. But as the lives of theſe gentlemen ſeem to claim no ſuch indulgence from Heaven, I ſhould have entertained a very uncomplaiſant opinion of them, if the legiſlature, by the repeal of the witch act, had not taught me to believe that our intercourſe with the devil was entirely at an end. In the midſt of my doubts the following letter gave me perfect ſatisfaction.

To Mr. FITZ-ADAM.

SIR,

ABOUT ten years ago the public was entertained with a very fanciful performance, entitled *Hermippus Redivivus, or the Sage's triumph over old age and the grave.* Though the ingenious author modeſtly ſets out with ſhewing the poſſibility of a man's extending the ſpan of life to a longer ſpace than he generally now enjoys, by inhaling the ſalubrious breath of unpoluted virgins; yet by degrees, almoſt imperceptible to the reader, he ſlides into the Hermetic philoſophy, of which he is an enthuſiaſtic admirer, and becomes, before the concluſion of his book, as thorough a believer in the power of the STONE and UNIVERSAL ELIXIR, as if he had been perſonally preſent when an adept had made projection. He introduces ſeveral moſt ſurprizing ſtories concerning philoſophers, who being ſkilled in the arcanum, lived for three or four centuries in the moſt unimpaired vi-

gour

gour both of mind and body. But as the moſt enviable ſtate of human felicity is imperfect, though theſe ſages were maſters of that omnipotent metal, which can make knaves honeſt, blockheads wits, and cowards heroes; which yields in the eſtabliſhed commerce of the world, all the neceſſaries, emoluments and luxuries of life, and almoſt deifies it's poſſeſſors; they were frequently neceſſitated to lead the lives of vagabonds, and to ſkulk from the obſervation of mankind in the darkeſt ſhades of obſcurity.

Among many other ſurprizing ſtories, he gives an account of a ſtranger who ſome time ago reſided at Venice. It was very remarkable, he ſays, that this man, though he lived in the utmoſt affluence and ſplendor, was unacquainted with any perſon belonging to the city before he came thither; that he followed no trade or merchandize; that he had no property in the common funds of the ſtate; nor ever received any remittance from abroad; yet abounded in wealth, till an accident, which he relates, drove him from Italy, from whence he ſuddenly diſappeared, and no mortal ever learnt from what place he came, or whither he went.

If this man was an Hermetic philoſopher, in poſſeſſion of the great ſecret, as the author inſinuates, I am enclined to think, from a ſimilarity of circumſtances, that we have at this very time a great number of that ſect in this metropolis, who, for the good of the nation, make gold at their pleaſure. I have had the happineſs of an acquaintance with ſeveral of theſe great men, who without any viſible means of livelihood, have ſhone forth with uncommon luſtre for a time, and then, to the regret of crowds of taylors, woollen-drapers, lacemen, mercers, milliners, &c. have ſuddenly diſappeared,

ed, and nobody ever knew the place of their retirement. This ſpeedy retreat I attribute to their fears leſt the ſtate ſhould diſcover from what ſource their wealth aroſe, and force them by it's power to proſtitute ſo ſacred and ineſtimable a ſcience to the deſtructive views of ambition.

IT has been obſerved of ſeveral of theſe philoſophers, that they have pretended to be of ſome lucrative profeſſion or employment, in order, as is ſuppoſed, to ſhelter themſelves from the prying eyes of certain individuals, who are apt, from I know not what old-faſhioned notion, to regard very coolly thoſe perſons, who being in poſſeſſion of no lands or chattels by inheritance, are unconnected with ſociety, and do not lend a helping hand in ſupplying ſomething to the real or imaginary wants of mankind. Many have affected to be thought the heirs of rich uncles or aunts in the country, from whom they were ſupplied with the comfortable ſufficiencies for genteel life: while others have inſinuated by their friends, that SOMEBODY has left them SOMETHING SOMEWHERE; and ſo feigned that they lived (as honeſt people phraſe it) *by their means*. But before enquiry could be made into thoſe means (if I may have leave to borrow a ſcripture expreſſion) *they went hence, and were no more ſeen.*

I REMEMBER a few years ago, there was a particular coffee-houſe about Covent-garden, much frequented by theſe adepts, which a friend of mine, a man of wit and humour, uſed ludicrouſly to call the ANNUAL coffee-houſe, as the ſame face was ſeldom obſerved to BLOW there a ſecond year. But of late they have been cautious of raiſing any ſuſpicion by aſſembling in too great numbers together, and are therefore diſperſed through all the coffee-houſes in the idle and genteel part of this city.

I WOULD not be underſtood from any thing I have ſaid,

ſaid, to infer that none of this reſpectable ſect ever take up their fixed reſidence in town; for I have known ſeveral and their families who have conſtantly dwelt here, and who, to the aſtoniſhment of the whole circle of their acquaintance, have lived for twenty years together in great ſplendor and luxury, ſpent every year as much as their original principal fortune amounted to, and ſtill flouriſh on in the ſame manner.

EVERY one in high life muſt, I dare ſay, have obſeved, that no people live ſo well as thoſe whom the world pronounces to be RUINED. I have known many of theſe RUINED perſons, both peers and commoners, riot in every luxury and extravagance, while the haughty owners of thouſands of unmortgaged acres have repined and ſickened at their ſuperior enjoyments. In ſhort, ſuch has been my aſſociation of ideas of late, that when I hear any man pronounced RUINED, I immediately conclude, by that expreſſion, that he has been admitted by the fraternity into the ineſtimable ſecret of the Hermetic philoſophy.

BUT however deſirous the poſſeſſors of this FIRST SCIENCE may be of appearing to draw their ſubſiſtance from the common and vulgar ſupplies of land, trade, ſtocks or profeſſions, rather than have it ſuſpected from whence their myſterious finances ariſe, yet ſuch numbers now abound of all ranks and conditions, that the government, I am told, begins to entertain an idea, or, as the vulgar phraſe it, to have an *inkling* of the matter. Indeed I am greatly ſurprized that the affair was not found out ſooner; for it is mathematically demonſtrable that if Great Britain and Ireland were large enough to hold all the boaſted poſſeſſions of theſe nominal landowners, the dominions of his preſent Majeſty would exceed